GAYS IN LIBRARY LAND

The Gay and Lesbian Task Force

of the American Library Association:

The First Sixteen Years

Honorary Member of ALA. 2003

by Barbara Gittings

"I don't see why those people are getting all the publicity when we have so many famous authors in town."

-- Librarian at 1971 American Library Association conference in Dallas, commenting on TV coverage of the Task Force on Gay Liberation's kissing booth in the exhibit hall.

A kissing booth at a librarians' convention? A gay kissing booth? What on earth were Those People up to?

Getting ourselves noticed, that's what. Making a gay presence to highlight gay issues in a setting where homosexuality wasn't typically viewed as a concern for the profession.

When the gay group in the American Library Association formed in 1970, it was the first of its kind, the first time that gay people in any professional association had openly banded together to advance the gay cause through that profession. Why didn't this happen first among gay professionals in law or religion or the behavioral sciences, the fields that had been treating homosexuality as a special concern?

It was just good luck for ALA to be the pioneer.

A year before, at ALA's annual conference, social activists had launched a new official unit of ALA, the Social Responsibilities Round Table, under whose wing self-created task forces began to tackle neglected issues in librarianship.

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Janet Cooper and Israel Fishman met at SRRT gatherings at ALA's 1970 conference in Detroit. They talked about not running scared anymore, and about using their professional standing and skills to openly influence library holdings on homosexuality. The Task Force on Gay Liberation was born. It was promptly endorsed by SRRT and was allocated a share of SRRT's small money pie (derived from dues separate from ALA dues). The TFGL drew a handful of other gay librarians who also were fired up by the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 (1) and were eager to change gay literature and gay people's lives.

I, too, was keen to push for change. Back in 1949, when I was a freshman in college, the confusion finally cleared and I put the label on and said to myself, "Homosexual--that's what I am, I'm one of those." So what were "those"? What did it mean to be a homosexual? What was in store for me? There wasn't anyone I could ask. So naturally I went to the library for information.

Today when I speak to gay groups and mention "the lies in the libraries," listeners over 35 know instantly what I mean. Most gays have at some point gone to books in an effort to understand about being gay or to get some help in living as gay. In my time, what we found was strange to us (they're writing about me but I'm not like that!) and cruelly clinical (there's nothing about <u>love</u>) and always bad (being this way seems grim and hopeless).

I flunked out of college at the end of my freshman year because I had stopped going to classes in order to run around to libraries and spend my time reading--reading about myself in categories such as "Sexual Perversions"--and wondering and worrying. When I returned home in disgrace, I couldn't explain to my parents what was wrong, and I still knew no one I could approach to talk to--so back to the stacks I went.

This time I was luckier. I found the fiction of homosexuality. In these stories, homosexuality often was an agony and the endings usually were unhappy. Still, the characters weren't case histories but people who had feelings and who loved and who even had times of happiness. From Stephen Gordon, the earnest strong dyke of Radclyffe Hall's <u>The Well of Loneliness</u>, to Compton Mackenzie's <u>Extraordinary Women</u>, the exotic figures of fun, they all made me feel much better about being a lesbian.

Soon I had my first mutual love affair, and soon after it ended I left home and landed in the nearest big city. After seeing to my most urgent needs--a job, a place to live, and a choral group to sing with--I devoted most of my spare time to my continuing education. I

spent hours in the Rare Book Room reading Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, and many more hours browsing in secondhand bookshops hoping to turn up gay novels.

Eventually I read Cory's The Homosexual in America (2) and was thrilled to find extensive checklists of literature in the back of his book. I arranged to meet Cory, and through him I found the then-tiny gay movement, which I officially joined in 1958. Now I had less time for reading and collecting. At first I did social and political organizing. Later I was picketing and marching for gay rights, battling homophobic bureaucrats, appearing on radio and later on TV, and editing The Ladder, the first national lesbian magazine.

But working in the movement kept reminding me that the written word has such a long-range effect, that the literature on homosexuality was so crucial in shaping the images that we and others have of ourselves, and that these distorted images we were forced to live with must not be allowed to continue. I knew that the lies in the libraries had to be changed, but I didn't have a clear sense that we gay people could do it.

Then for a few months in 1970 I was asked to report gay news on New York's WBAI-FM. One day, in the station's mail slot for the gay broadcast, I found a news release from the Task Force on Gay Liberation of the American Library Association. A group of gay librarians had formed and was inviting others to join.

Gay books? Libraries? That rang bells for me!

I went to early meetings of TFGL in New York in the fall of 1970 and was welcomed. The group was ambitiously planning a sizeable annotated bibliography. Meanwhile, a short list of the most positive materials available was wanted for distribution at the Midwinter conference of ALA, and I helped put together that first non-fiction bibliography, dated January 1971, with 37 entries--books, pamphlets, and articles. That first list was easy. We were still ten years away from the great explosion of gay materials that would mean Reader's Delight Equals List-Maker's Plight.

Israel Fishman was TFGL's first coordinator, and his talent for making a flamboyant presence helped put the group boldly on the ALA map that first year. For the annual conference in June 1971 in Dallas (I was there, I was now thoroughly hooked!) the group planned solid, professional program events: the first Gay Book Award; talks by Joan Marshall and Steve Wolf under the joint title "Sex and the Single Cataloger: New Thoughts on Some Unthinkable Subjects" (3); and a talk by Michael McConnell, who had lost a new library job in 1970 after

he and his lover Jack Baker applied openly for a marriage license, and who was fighting his job discrimination case in the federal courts.

But solid, professional program events need audiences. We needed publicity. At the biggest meetings during the conference, we aggressively leafletted with 3,000 copies of a revised edition of our list, which now was titled "A Gay Bibliography" and had 48 entries including a few periodicals and featured a bold "Gay Is Good" logo at the head. We posted notices of our activities all around the conference premises--and kept replacing them as they disappeared. We ran a hospitality suite in the main convention hotel where we offered free copies of gay periodicals and a place to relax and talk.

We took over the microphones at a huge meeting of the Intellectual Freedom Committee that was playing fictitious "value games" and claimed the audience's attention with a real example of intellectual freedom abuse: the case of Michael McConnell, whose earlier appeal to the IFC had been brushed aside even though IFC's own policies were clearly applicable to his situation. We weren't afraid to pre-empt a tame meeting and give it some guts.

And we learned, with the help of McConnell's lover Jack Baker, how to do news releases. Late each night we were in ALA's on-location offices using the typewriters and xerox machines to produce short write-ups of our past or coming activities, always including not only the main facts but a lively quote or two ("Catalog librarians declare that 15 million gay Americans refuse to be called Sexual Aberrations"). Then we went around Dallas hand-delivering the releases to newspapers, wire services, and radio and TV broadcast stations.

What a heady time! We were activists. We were innovative, bold, imaginative, full of fun and energy, full of love for promoting our cause.

Predictably, it was our gay kissing booth that really threw us into the limelight. All the SRRT task forces had been invited to use a booth in the conference exhibit hall for a couple of hours each. We could have devoted our turn to a nice display of books and periodicals and our "Gay Bibliography." But Israel Fishman decided to bypass books and show gay love, live.

We called it Hug-a-Homosexual. On the bare grey curtains forming the back wall of the booth, we hung signs reading "Women Only" at one end and "Men Only" at the other, and there we waited, smiling, ready to dispense free (yes, free) same-sex kisses and hugs.

The aisles were jammed. But no one entered the booth. They all wanted to ogle the action, not be part of it. Maybe the Life photographer and the glaring lights from two Dallas TV crews made them feel shy.

Hundreds of exhibit visitors crowded around and craned their necks as the eight of us in the booth hugged and kissed each other, called encouragement to the watchers, kissed and hugged each other some more--and between times handed out our bibliography to those in the throng.

Librarians at that 1971 conference learned fast that lesbians and gay men are here and everywhere, that we won't go away, and that we will insist on our rights and recognition. Result: In the last days of the conference, we got both the Council (the elected policy-making body of ALA) and the general membership to pass our pro-gay resolution (4). Maybe some librarians voted for it because it seemed innocuously vague, and maybe others voted for it in hopes we wouldn't embarrass ALA with another Hug-a-Homosexual stunt. Still, the resolution did become official policy of ALA.

Our group's aim to change library holdings on homosexuality coincided with a shift in the book business itself. In 1969, even the best non-fiction writing on gays was mostly by non-gay authors, and it hedged about us, sniped at us, clucked over us, or dissected us.

But the Stonewall uprising of 1969 galvanized many gay people to new action. Some produced book manuscripts that caught editors' fancy as the major trade publishers sighted a whole new market. At the time our gay group sprouted in ALA, publishers were processing the first major crop of gay-positive books by gay authors. There were a dozen of them, and they boosted by fifty percent the books section of the June 1972 edition of our "Gay Bibliography." Now the first title on the list was no longer Atkinson's Sexual Morality but Abbott and Love's Sappho Was a Right-On Woman.

Our first Gay Book Award in 1971 also reflected the publishing transition. Isabel Miller, a published writer under her own name Alma Routsong, could not, in 1968-69, sell her novel about a lesbian couple homesteading in the early 1800's. So she published it herself in 1970. At the time she came to Dallas in 1971 to receive our Gay Book Award for A Place For Us, she was negotiating with McGraw-Hill for a hardcover edition of her novel to be retitled Patience and Sarah--and McGraw-Hill was one of the publishers who had turned it down before. We had found a way to honor our own gay authors just as the first wave of general recognition was breaking.

I loved working with the Task Force on Gay Liberation. So when Israel Fishman wanted to step out as coordinator and suggested me for the job, I was delighted to accept. I took out membership in ALA (ALA accepts lay members) to facilitate the necessary working-through-channels within the association.

Since we now had a formula for success at ALA conferences, we used it in Chicago in 1972. Again, posting notices and handing out the "Gay Bibliography" at large meetings kept people aware of us, and this time our main events were also listed in the official conference program.

Michael McConnell brought an overflow audience up to date on his case: a federal appeals court, reversing a lower court's ruling in his favor, had said that while there was no question he was fully qualified for the library job he was denied, the university was entitled to renege because he demanded "the right to pursue an activist role in implementing his unconventional ideas" (court's emphasis).

Joan Marshall spoke again wittily on the queer ways gay books are classified, and she told about one positive change, the Library of Congress's new number, HQ 76.5, for works on "Gay Liberation Movement."

The authors of Lesbian/Woman, Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, and The Gay Mystique, Peter Fisher, were on hand to receive jointly the second Gay Book Award. And there were poetry readings from Sappho, Walt Whitman, Constantin Cavafy and Gertrude Stein, reminding our audience of 250 that these writers whose works they value on library shelves had a homosexual dimension to their lives and their art.

Our hospitality suite that year was large and, thanks to enthusiastic gay friends in Chicago, was kept open twelve hours a day for people to talk, browse in gay books, walk through a display of photos of gay love and gay liberation activities, and examine a set of art works by famous artists (Rodin, Homer, Hockney, etc.) showing same-sex couples. When the wife of the ALA president came to look us over, we felt we'd really arrived.

But our job was as much to unsettle ALA over gay issues as to settle into the ALA fabric. With good gay reading for adults fairly launched, what about gay reading for kids? In February 1972, School Library Journal published an article about our group by Mary McKenney, who noted that school libraries owe, but rarely give, good service to young gay people or to any students who want sensible information about homosexuality.

At the ALA conference in June of that year, we unveiled our first gay primer, Fun With Our Gay Friends, in which Dick and Jane and their playmates casually meet same-sex adult couples as a natural part of the world around them. Frances Hanckel, another non-librarian in TFGL, insisted the primer deserved more attention than mere display. So, spoofing ALA's Newbery-Caldecott Awards for children's books, we created and bestowed the New Raspberry-Cold Cut Award. Alas, there was no rush of publishers to put this winner into mass circulation. But we knew we'd come back to the theme of gay reading for youngsters.

We skipped the 1973 conference and the Gay Book Award for that year. None of our core members could get to Las Vegas, and there was no outstanding book we wanted to honor. Still we tried to maintain our presence at ALA by means of a flier which we asked friends in SRRT to post and hand around at the conference.

We were unmistakably present in New York City in 1974. Our smiling leafletteers, all two of them, blitzed the conference in its first three days with 4,000 copies each of our "Gay Bibliography" and a flier announcing our activities. Almost 300 people turned up to hear "Let's Not Homosexualize the Library Stacks," Michael McConnell's reasoned appeal to move from "Homosexual" to "Gay" in subject headings in order to spur needed changes in attitude.

Appropriately, our first Gay Book Award author, Isabel Miller, presented the 1974 award to Sex Variant Women in Literature by Jeannette Foster, a retired librarian. Dr. Foster too had had publishing trouble. When in the mid-1950's she finished her critical survey of lesbianism and sexual variance in literature from Sappho through 20th century writings in English, German, and French, no publisher would touch it, not even a university press. She had to go to a vanity house in 1956 to see it in print, and then wait almost twenty years more to see it properly republished. We were pleased to recognize her pioneer work.

By now we had a reputation for putting on programs that appealed to librarians' professional interests and were also entertaining. Over 400 people attended our 1975 program on negative gay themes in teenage novels, "The Children's Hour: Must Gay Be Grim for Jane and Jim?"

It struck sparks. The lively debate it triggered convinced us to do a follow-up panel discussion as part of the next year's program. And the energy momentum drove the program's architects, Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham, to prepare a set of "Guidelines for the

Treatment of Gay Themes in Children's and Young Adult Literature" (September 1975), to write an article for the library press called "Can Young Gays Find Happiness in YA Books?" (5), and to collaborate on a trade book titled A Way of Love, a Way of Life: A Young Person's Introduction to What It Means To Be Gay (Lothrop, Lee and Shepard, 1979).

Other popular programs:

-- "Serving the Fearful Reader" (1976), a series of skits about what can happen when patrons who are timid or confused about homosexuality approach the reference desk, plus a superbly-acted pantomime on the stolen-book problem called "Now You See It, Now You Don't";

-- "Gay Film Festival" (1978), eighteen non-fiction gay/lesbian films including the just-released blockbuster "Word Is Out";

-- "An Evening with Gertrude Stein" (1979), a re-creation by actress Pat Bond that was so moving that one librarian told us afterwards, "You know, I've never read Gertrude Stein, but I'm going to read her now";

-- "Gay Materials for Use in Schools" (1980);

-- "It's Safer To Be Gay on Another Planet" (1981), about gay themes in science fiction/fantasy, with author Robert Silverberg as panel moderator;

-- "The Celluloid Closet: Lesbians and Gay Men in Hollywood Film" (1982), Vito Russo's now-famous lecture with film clips from 1895 to today, including several startling outtake scenes;

-- "Why Keep All Those Posters, Buttons, and Papers? The Problems and Rewards of Gay/Lesbian Archives" (1983);

-- "Closet Keys: Gay/Lesbian Periodicals for Libraries (1984);

-- "You Want to Look Up WHAT?? Indexing the Lesbian and Gay Press"; also, "Blind Lesbians and Gays: The Lavender Pen on Cassette and in Braille" (1985).

Our programs were always open to the gay community in the host city. We publicized our ALA events through local gay groups and publications, and we let people know they didn't need to be registered for the conference, they didn't even need to be librarians. They were welcome to walk in--and they did.

Also we weren't shy about asking host-city people for help with everything from bringing refreshments, to

donating flowers to dress up the podium, to leafletting with us around the conference. Occasionally, local activists would set up a bonus event for the benefit of TFGL members. Examples: in Los Angeles, the national president of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Adele Starr, and her husband Larry Starr came to our business meeting to talk about their work with libraries and to exchange ideas; in New York City, we went to showings of films about May Sarton and Christopher Isherwood, arranged by the Gay Teachers Association.

Our open-door policy was partly due to our having, in the early years, several non-librarians besides myself in key roles in the Task Force--most notably Jack Baker; Frances Hanckel, who was active in the group for over seven years; and Kay (Tobin) Lahusen, who for fifteen years contributed vision, practical help, and a photo history of our activities. Publicity and propaganda were as much needed as librarian skills, and there was plenty of work for everyone who wanted to boost gay materials and their handling in libraries.

Participation by non-librarians not only brought extra energy and talent to our group, it also was good for ALA's image. Hundreds of gay men and lesbians across the United States who wouldn't dream of being involved in professional meetings of doctors, historians, and the like--except perhaps to demonstrate against them--found themselves happily rubbing elbows with librarians at ALA conferences.

The lay-professional mix in the Gay Task Force (as it was renamed in 1975 so the word Gay would hit the eye first) was aided by ALA's and SRRT's few rules about structure and membership, and by the very loose organization of GTF itself. For its first sixteen years, including the fifteen years I served as coordinator, GTF had no elected officers, no membership requirements, no dues. As coordinator I handled most of the ongoing scut work: ALA paperwork and deadlines; SRRT meetings and reports; correspondence; set-up and printing of fliers and the "Gay Bibliography" and other publications; the mailing list; program arrangements; recruiting. Other jobs were done by those willing to do them, for the fun and satisfaction.

In outreach beyond the library field we scored best with "A Gay Bibliography." We had begun this list as a selective guide to the small crop of gay-supportive books just beginning to appear in 1970-71, plus a few key gay periodicals and pamphlets. Naturally we wanted the list to reach not only librarians who buy for their libraries, but also gay people who might be searching for the sparse gay material then available in libraries and bookstores.

By dint of our efforts to promote our one-of-a-kind guide, we began getting mentions of our bibliography and our group in books then being published, such as Sappho Was a Right-On Woman (1972) and Lesbian/Woman (1972). Even in 1990, the GTF hears from people who have just come across these books and who write "I hope there's still somebody at this address after all these years."

For some who write to us, it's their first contact with a gay/lesbian group. The "information" they often need is more than finding gay reading--it means finding other gay people. What a boon it's been to have Gayellow Pages to steer them to!

Our "Gay Bibliography," issued yearly at first, soon got harder to revise so often. The 6th edition, in March 1980, with 563 entries including audio-visuals, took more than a year to put together and cost several thousand dollars to produce. We had to take a breather. Fortunately we had ordered a big printing run, and over the next few years more than 38,000 copies of that edition were distributed in and out of libraries.

As gay materials grew in quantity and quality, we began getting requests for shorter lists, lists crafted for a particular audience or focussing on one topic. For example, an aide to a midwestern state legislator asked for no more than a dozen basic gay items to start educating lawmakers who knew little about homosexuality. "If you give them a long list, it's too much to grasp and they won't look at anything," she said. We complied.

Other inquiries came from lesbians and gay men who wanted guidance to novels, since our bibliography's book titles were non-fiction and biography. Founders of the early Parents-of-Gays groups sought to pinpoint materials about gay peoples' relationships with their families. And once a librarian at a men's prison wrote that some inmates wanted to be able to use gay materials without advertising the fact; would we make up a list of gay male books without the words "gay" or "homosexual" in the titles or showing on the covers? We did.

There was one challenge we couldn't meet: the occasional request to "Please send all available information on homosexuality. My term paper is due next week."

Out of the requests we got most often came a series of short lists, including "Gay Resources for Religious Study," "Gay Materials for Use in Schools," and "Gay Aids for Counselors," all launched in 1978 and revised several times, and "Gay Teachers Resources" (1979, 1980). "A Short Lesbian Reading List" (also first issued in 1978) prompted more than one reader to ask, "Is it for tall lesbians too?"

One special list we started in 1976, "Gay Books in Format for the Blind and Physically Handicapped," was eventually adopted, with our gratitude, by another organization far better equipped to keep it up to date and circulate it, the Lambda Resource Center for the Blind in Chicago.

We also drew up a short list aimed specifically at librarians. In 1976 John Cunningham pointed out that H. W. Wilson's Public Library Catalog recommended only two books on homosexuality: Merle Miller's On Being Different and Peter and Barbara Wyden's anti-gay Growing Up Straight. Cunningham's efforts to deal directly with the catalog editors got mired in the Wilson company's complicated national-jury system for its selections. So we prepared a "Gay Materials Core Collection List" (1976, updated annually through 1980) as a buying guide for small and medium-sized public libraries. For five years we did our best to counteract the inadequacies of Wilson's recommendations, which continued to lag far behind publishing trends in the choice of gay titles.

As more good gay literature came out, lay people too were itching to get the stuff into libraries. Stuart W. Miller headed our committee of eight who produced a pamphlet of tips for non-librarians, "Censored, Ignored, Overlooked, Too Expensive? How to Get Gay Materials Into Libraries" (1979). This booklet explained library selection policies in a general way, and told what groups and individuals could do to promote gay books and periodicals in their public and college libraries. It included sections on what to do if your request is turned down, on why gay books are sometimes kept where you have to ask for them, and on donating materials to the library.

Ordinary libraries weren't our only concern. Gay and lesbian libraries and archives had begun forming in the 1960's, to provide concentrated collections and preserve materials that wouldn't be acquired by most mainstream libraries. Each such library/archive had to create its own classifications and subject headings, because existing schemes for organizing information, such as Dewey and Library of Congress, weren't intended for the depth and scope of specialized collections. But why keep inventing the wheel? In 1985 Joseph Gregg and Robert Ridinger began developing a master thesaurus of subject terms that will make it easier for gay libraries to coordinate with each other and for their users to find materials.

Much of GTF's work was guidance and encouragement with respect to gay materials produced by others. The one kind of information on homosexuality we hoped to influence directly was encyclopedia articles. Encyclopedias are a first source of information for many readers, and they carry authority, especially with school students

who assume the material in them is the best available. What students read about us in encyclopedias in the 1970's ranged from dismal to depressing. As for accuracy, it had as much relevance to our lives as though a skin doctor were to write about black people. Our committee on encyclopedia changes reviewed the major encyclopedias (6) and also planned to ask gay psychiatrists and psychologists, whose "expert" credentials might more readily impress encyclopedia editors, to work with us to effect changes.

So many avenues for us to explore! For a few years in the early 1980's we turned our Midwinter meetings into mini-programs--"mini" only in the size of the rooms allotted us, since at the smaller Midwinter conference of ALA each January, ALA units were supposed to have only working sessions for their members, no programs for large audiences. Thirty to forty people would cram GTF's small room to hear our unofficial programs:

-- In 1981, two librarians who came to explain the case of a Virginia Beach gay newspaper that was removed from a freebie table in the public library's lobby;
-- In 1982, "The Family Protection Act vs. First Amendment Rights";
-- In 1984, "Gay-Lesbian Publishing and the Library of Congress: Coming Out and Going In";
-- In 1985, "Gay Materials in Smalltown, USA?"

At the 1986 Midwinter conference we did arrange a full-scale, big-room program on "AIDS Awareness: The Library's Role." Despite co-sponsorship by the Public Library Association, a major division of ALA, there was a very disappointing turnout for this excellent presentation of the AIDS Information Project at the Chicago Public Library in cooperation with the Chicago Department of Health. For shame, that we were ahead of our time in raising the AIDS issue in ALA in early 1986.

We had other disapppointments too.

For instance, there was our experiment with sign language interpretation. Lyn Paleo, a speaker at our 1981 panel "It's Safer To Be Gay on Another Planet," happened to be a signer, and she offered to interpret the whole program. We announced this in advance. A number of deaf librarians attended the program and told us afterwards how pleased they were to have something they could go to at the conference outside of the few signed sessions devoted to deaf concerns.

We thought we'd latched onto a good thing. So the next year we paid for interpreters for our main and secondary programs, both lectures with audio-visuals:

"The Celluloid Closet: Lesbians and Gay Men in Hollywood Film" by Vito Russo, and "From 'Boston Marriage' to the Tell-All 1970's: One Hundred Years of the Lesbian in Biography" by Marie Kuda. Again, we advertised the signing. This time, not a single person wanting sign interpretation showed up. It was a worthy but expensive gesture and we didn't repeat it.

Then there was the fizzle of our gay mediagraphy for teenagers. After Frances Hanckel and John Cunningham set ALA buzzing about young-adult gay materials in 1975-76, the Media Selection and Usage Committee of the Young Adult Services Division invited two GTF members as consultants to help MSUC prepare a mediagraphic essay on the gay experience. Here was a great chance for us to influence a recommended basic-collection list to be issued by an influential group in ALA. After a couple of productive meetings to review films and books, the project fell apart, then was put back on track by a new MSUC chair, then collapsed again. Why was never clear.

We also fared badly with a project strictly our own, our discrimination survey in 1978. We wanted to know, beyond our small group, what are the concerns of gay and lesbian library workers about discrimination and/or censorship on the job? We crafted a questionnaire to find out. To reach as many people as possible, we saturated the 1978 conference with the questionnaire: copies in stacks right near conference registration documents that everyone would pick up, copies handed out to everyone at doorways to meetings big and small, even copies laid on audience chairs in advance of some meetings. No one needed to feel singled out in getting a copy.

The result after several thousand questionnaires were distributed? Only 135 were returned. Most of the respondents reported they didn't feel any pressures strong or subtle affecting themselves or gay materials for their libraries. This "No Problem" picture struck us as skewed, but at the time we had no other way to discover different stories.

Certainly there <u>was</u> prejudice in library land. We had a prime case to prove it: Michael McConnell. For four years starting in 1971, McConnell and others in GTF protested his job loss at Council and Membership meetings. Each time the case was bumped along for "study" or "investigation"--to the Intellectual Freedom Committee, to the desk of ALA's Executive Director, to the Staff Committee on Mediation, Arbitration and Inquiry.

Each report recommended No Action, citing in part such technicalities as the fact that the university which dumped McConnell in 1970 wasn't violating any ALA policy in force at that time. Since ALA did adopt our 1971 gay

support resolution (see note 4) and in 1974 an equal-employment policy including the phrase "regardless of... individual lifestyle," it's plain that ALA failed the spirit if not the letter of fairness by refusing even in 1975 to go to bat for McConnell.

ALA was a bit less squeamish about gay rights by the time Anita Bryant launched a national crusade against gay rights in 1976. Anita Bryant, until then best known as a Christian singer and a publicist for Florida orange juice, expected her "Save Our Children" campaign to roll back gay civil rights laws and to undo other gains toward equality achieved by our movement. (7) The Gay Task Force got ALA Council to pass in 1977 a resolution reaffirming "its support for equal employment opportunity for gay librarians and library workers" and reminding libraries of "their obligation under the Library Bill of Rights to disseminate information representing all points of view on this controversial topic."

By 1985 ALA was ready to take a stronger stand on a case of actual rather than anticipated censorship. England's only gay/lesbian bookstore, Gay's the Word, had been raided in 1984 by British customs officers who arbitrarily seized as "obscene and indecent" quantities of books and periodicals imported from Giovanni's Room, one of the largest American gay bookstores and a major distributor of gay/lesbian materials to Great Britain and other countries. The manager and directors of Gay's the Word were up for trial for criminal conspiracy.

In the resolution we proposed, we were asking ALA to criticize a foreign government. So we sought and got endorsements from no less than seven sub-groups of ALA, including two international-relations groups. After the resolution passed, ALA wrote to the British ambassador in Washington expressing "concern...about the restrictions on access to information in the United Kingdom" because of the raid on the London gay bookstore. (8)

The one section of ALA we could always count on to support our actions was our parent group, the Social Responsibilities Round Table. In addition, SRRT was as generous with money as it could be. Still, the few hundred dollars we got each year never covered our expenses for all our busy doings. So we cheerfully dipped into our own pockets, hustled donations, and became adept at doing things frugally but with flair.

For instance, our awards for the Gay Book Award were usually items that cost little or were donated, tokens of symbolic value or of personal interest for the author: hand-lettered scrolls, a lavender commencement cap, mounted copies of gay art works, a butterfly kite, a movie poster, a lavender cape.

At first, decisions about the title or titles for the Gay Book Award were made by consensus. When that became impractical, Frances Hanckel set up a committee to get nominations and make choices. By 1981 we had settled on formal guidelines and procedures for the award.

It was time to get our Gay Book Award inside the ALA tent. I applied to ALA's Awards Committee in 1982; the matter went on hold for a while, but finally I propelled it through. My last public act as coordinator of the Gay Task Force was to announce at our 1986 program that our Gay Book Award was now an official award of ALA.

I had fun in library land those sixteen years. I'm proud of our accomplishments. And I think it was more than chance that ALA was the first professional association to be liberated by gay activists. Librarians are after all committed to inquiry, the open mind, and dissemination of information. We worked in a truly civilized setting.

We got the gay tide rolling in ALA. Librarians: Run with it, get more and better gay materials in libraries. Library users: Do the same. Take a librarian to lunch, if you will, and enjoy yourself while making your pitch. After all, what is activism without fun? I can almost guarantee results!

NOTES

(1) By 1969 the gay rights movement was already two decades old and slowly growing. On June 28 that year in New York City, an ordinary police raid on a gay bar called Stonewall Inn sparked an extraordinary fight-back reaction that flared into three days of rioting in Greenwich Village. It was front-page news all across the country. In the afterglow of this spontaneous uprising, thousands of gay individuals who'd had little or no connection with the movement were inspired to join existing gay organizations or to start new ones--and within a year from Stonewall, the gay movement had expanded tenfold. A good brief account of the rebellion appears in Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970 by John D'Emilio (University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 231-233.

(2) Cory, Donald Webster. The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach (Greenberg, 1951). This was the first American book to proclaim the radical idea that gay people are a minority group and should push for civil rights.

(3) Some of this material can be found in the article by Steve Wolf, "Sex and the Single Cataloger," in Revolting Librarians, edited by Celeste West, Elizabeth Katz, et. al. (Booklegger Press, 1972).

(4) "The American Library Association recognizes that there exist minorities which are not ethnic in nature but which suffer oppression. The association recommends that libraries and members strenuously combat discrimination in services to, and employment of, individuals from all minority groups, whether distinguishing characteristics of the minority be ethnic, sexual, religious, or any other kind." (Passed by ALA Council and ALA Membership, June 1971.)

(5) Hanckel, Frances and John Cunningham. "Can Young Gays Find Happiness in YA Books?" Wilson Library Bulletin, Vol. 50, No. 7 (March 1976). This article incorporated the "Guidelines for the Treatment of Gay Themes in Children's and Young Adult Literature," very slightly rephrased for librarians.

(6) Burke, Dale C. "Homophobia in Encyclopedias." Interracial Books for Children Bulletin, Vol. 14, Nos. 3 and 4 (1983). This special issue of IBCB on "Homophobia and Education" also includes excellent articles on gay themes in teenage novels, the treatment of homosexuality in sex-education books, and access to gay/lesbian materials via cataloging.

(7) Anita Bryant's crusade lent itself to being spoofed. GTF member Kay Lahusen wrote an ultra-short puppet play, "Flaming Fundamentalist Meets Football Faggot," in which gay football player Dave Kopay [The David Kopay Story (Arbor House, 1977)] applies for a coaching job at Anita Bryant's Christian school--and worlds collide. The playlet was performed by puppet artist Jim Moyski at the 1977 ALA conference in Detroit.

(8) In 1986 the British government finally got itself off the hook of international embarrassment by dropping all the charges.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article was originally intended to appear in Gay and Lesbian Library Service, edited by Cal Gough and Ellen Greenblatt (McFarland, 1990). Unusual demands on my time kept me from meeting the deadline for the book.

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